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SUBJECT: BOSNIA: NGOS PAINT A GLOOMY PICTURE OF POLITICAL  
CLIMATE

#### Summary

1. (U) On November 21, the Ambassador hosted NGO representatives participating at a roundtable commemorating the twelfth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords. Participants were pessimistic about the prospects for improvements in Bosnia's political environment and complained of being marginalized by the government. They accused political leaders of ignoring the needs of the electorate to pursue their own agendas. Nonetheless, participants offered no suggestions on how they could improve the situation. The Ambassador urged participants to consider how they as heads of organizations and as individuals can affect change.

#### NGOS PAINT A GLOOMY PICTURE-----

2. (U) To commemorate the twelfth anniversary of the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement, the Ambassador participated in a USAID-hosted roundtable with representatives of NGOs from around the country who expressed frustration with the current political climate. While they acknowledged the progress NGOs have made over the years, representatives described being marginalized in government decision making on a wide range of issues affecting their constituencies. Most blamed incompetence and corruption on the part of political parties and consecutive governments, although one participant accused other NGOs, particularly RS-based organizations, of working to advance political agendas. Another blamed the international community for doing little to help civil society become involved in policymaking but acknowledged the responsibility of civil society in realizing that objective.

3. (U) Participants cited constitutional reform as among the most important objectives in national politics and intimated that, until this issue is solved, it is unlikely that other issues would be fully addressed. At the same time, they noted the need to pay greater attention to minorities such as the Roma, as well as issues affecting women and rural communities; public fatigue and apathy; and the tendency to elect corrupt officials. Encouragingly, a participant noted that, though NGOs had focused on working with the international community on humanitarian aid, NGOs now want to become involved in decision-making to address the public's needs.

CHANGE IS NEEDED NOW

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14. (U) Participants were adamant that the current political structure in Bosnia must change but offered few ideas of how to achieve this. After thanking the USG for its contributions to Bosnia over the years, an academic called for greater U.S. engagement in the country in general terms. He also spoke of educating politicians on the need to work with civil society to address the public's needs. This prompted another participant to declare that civil society have been educating politicians for years but that the only thing politicians respond to is pressure. Another recurrent theme was the need to improve the education system and creating a workforce equipped with the skills foreign companies need in Bosnia.

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